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review

A new Russia is coming

National orchestra performs music of the old country

By **JOSEPH DALTON**, Special to the Times Union
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A taste of the new Russia is on its way to the Capital Region on Friday night, thanks to the Troy Chromatics. As the final presentation of its season -- and the second foreign orchestra to appear under the Chromatics aegis in just three months -- conductor Mikhail Pletnev leads the Russian National Orchestra into Troy Savings Bank Music Hall.

Established in 1990, the RNO was the first non-government-funded musical organization to be established in the former Soviet Union.



But fear not: The orchestra will be performing the music of old Russia. The program features Tchaikovsky's "Francesca da Rimini" and Glazunov's Symphony No. 6 as well as Rachmaninoff's powerful "Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini," with guest pianist Nikolai Lugansky.

The RNO has been in the United States since the beginning of the month, with a weeklong residence at the Festival of the Arts in Boca

Raton, Fla., and with two performances happening this week in New York City. In their role as ambassadors of the new Russia, the RNO provided an appropriately youthful spokesman for a recent interview -- its 24-year-old principal oboist Andrey Rubtsov.

Already a member of the orchestra for six years, Rubtsov was the youngest player to join the RNO's ranks. He says that most of its members are his generational peers, and that fact shows up in the playing.

"It's really energetic because of so many young people," says Rubtsov. "The sound that comes from the orchestra has something to do with that. When conductors work with us, they don't really have to make us play something really energetically and passionately. They just have it right away."

Rubtsov hastens to point out that the RNO is not a student orchestra but a full-time, professional ensemble, and the best-paid in Moscow.

The more open society of new Russia has allowed its musicians to keep abreast of Western-style salaries as well as the level of performance on this side of what used to be called the Iron Curtain.

"The playing standards have risen after the end of the Soviet Union, (because musicians) could really start going to the West," says Rubtsov. "The level of playing, especially on wind instruments, is growing so quickly."

Ironically, Rubtsov's own introduction to the difference between Russian and American oboe playing came through lessons with a Russian, Eugene Izotov. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's new principal oboist, the 34-year-old Izotov was born in Moscow but has been based in the United States for the last 10 years.

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"We met at some international festival and had some lessons," says Rubtsov. "It was really interesting to exchange ideas. American teachers really pay much more attention to orchestra playing. The Russian oboe school emphasizes the solo sound."

Rubtsov's real mentor in maturing as a musician has been Pletnev, the RNO's founder and artistic director. When Rubtsov was only 18 years old and named principal oboe, the conductor was there for him.

"He's like a father," says Rubtsov. "He was delicate. He didn't push me. He helped me to get into, gave me some time to really feel how it's working and what is necessary for me."

According to Rubtsov, Pletnev provides the same gentle care to music itself.

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